

# **Master-Thesis**

## **Shyness in consumer behavior**

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Supervisor: Irene Consiglio

Course of studies: International Management

Nova School of Business and Economics, Lisbon, Portugal

from

Sandra Kusterer

Alemannenstr. 4, 89426 Wittislingen

Student number: 24796 (2711)

## Abstract

**Title: Shyness in consumer behavior**

Shyness is widespread among the population and affects a large group of consumers. Companies, however, have barely knowledge about this kind of consumers and their behavior. Particularly in the field of complaint management the barriers which prevent consumers of voicing a complaint are largely unknown and quite often companies are not aware of the dissatisfaction among their customers. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the impact of shyness on consumer complaint behavior. A survey-based approach was performed and it was detected that shy consumers have a slight preference for online over offline channels when complaining directly to the company. Further, shy consumers call less likely the customer service than non-shy consumers to voice their dissatisfaction.

**Keywords:** shyness, complaint, consumer behavior, channel choice

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## 1. Introduction

4% of unhappy customers voice their complaint directly to the company (1st Financial Training Services 2009). In other words, for every direct customer complaint, there are about 25 other unsatisfied customers, who remain silent (Shaw 2013). Voiced complaints are only the tip of the iceberg. Thus, the absence of negative feedback does not automatically mean overall customer satisfaction is high. Often the intentions of dissatisfied customers are unclear. So far the behavior of so called *non-complainers* did not yet receive much attention in literature discussing consumer complaining behavior. Little research has been done about consumers' reactions on critical incidents and their decisions on voicing a complaint or remaining silent. (Cho, Im, Hiltz et. al. 2002)

Nearly every second person in the world claims to be shy. Scientists furthermore were able to demonstrate that this prevalence of self-reported shyness is increasing (Carducci 2000; Henderson, Gilbert, and Zimbardo 2014). Considering that shyness is a widespread phenomenon and affects a large proportion of the population it is of great importance to shed light on the impact shyness has on consumer behavior. Further, companies barely know about the preferences of shy consumers as those engage less in social situations and try to avoid interacting with strangers. When dealing with consumer complaining behavior shyness might prevent customers from complaining as this requires a certain degree of interaction with the company (strangers). The following paper thus focuses on the role of shyness in complaint management. (Whitten 2001)

## 2. Theoretical Foundation

### 2.1. Consumer Complaint Behavior

A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction on a consumer's behalf to a responsible party” (Landon 1980 p.337). Consumer dissatisfaction occurs most likely in the

post-purchase evaluation and might not always lead to a behavioral response towards the responsible party. To analyze the different response patterns of customer dissatisfaction, Hirschmann developed the first consumer complaining behavior framework in 1974. This framework classifies the complaining patterns in “exit”, “voice” and “loyalty”. Moreover, complaining response patterns have been categorized into: Passives, Voicers, Irates and Activists (Singh 1988). Day and Landon (1977), on the contrary, developed a two-level complaining behavior framework.

At the beginning of the framework stands a dissatisfaction incident, which failed to meet the customers’ expectations. Such incidents are unavoidable and affect every company regardless its size or industry (Zaugg 2006). Dissatisfaction can be caused by employees (20%), the customer itself (40%) or by the product or the process (40%). In case the employee fails to deliver the required service, customers are four times more likely to switch to the competitor instead of when the dissatisfaction is caused by a product or process related failure. The degree of customer dissatisfaction differs strongly among individuals as customers have disparate expectations towards the company (Goodman and Newman 2003). Thus, not every customer dissatisfaction leads automatically to a complaint. The decision to voice a complaint or not is influenced by several factors. For example, consumer complaint behavior might be triggered by the importance of the product for the individual, the likelihood of success of the complaint, the product importance and the individual’s ability and willingness to voice such a complaint. Lee and Cude (2012) identified three types of factors influencing customer complaint propensity:

- **Product-specific factors:** product importance, involvement, price-performance ratio
- **Environmental factors:** complaint situation, seriousness of the problem, cost of complaining, convenience of complaint channels, firm’s responsiveness, industry and market structure, perceived benefits related to costs

- **Consumer-related factors:** personal characteristics and values, loyalty, demographics, emotions, degree of dissatisfaction, attitudes towards complaining and the company

While several factors play an important role in the decision of voicing a complaint or not, Day and Landon distinguish on the first level of their framework between behavioral (“Take Action”) and non-behavioral responses (“Take No Action”). Non-behavioral responses are considered as “forget about the incident and do nothing.”

On the second level of the framework the behavioral category is divided into “Private Action” and “Public Action”. Private actions are largely invisible for companies and imply negative word-of-mouth as well as personal boycott of the brand, which can be equated with the end of the relationship. Public actions, contrariwise, are visible for the company and can be “complaints towards agencies or governments”, “legal actions” or “direct complaints” towards the company. Consumers might engage in several of those options to express their dissatisfaction. Those options represent the third level of the framework. In this context a voiced complaint is understood as a public action directed towards the company as the responsible party. A silent complaint, on the contrary, is not voiced to the company directly. Nonetheless, a silent complaint can be voiced towards third parties. (Ro and Mattila 2015)

To shed further light on the channel choice when voicing direct complaints, Mattila and Wirtz (2006) extended the framework from Day and Landon by two other levels: the tendency towards interactive and remote channels and the channel of communication. As online channels increasingly gain importance in the communication, the framework was adapted accordingly (Figure 1). Thus, on the fourth level of the framework it is distinguished between “offline” and “online” channels. Offline channels might be face-to-face interactions as well as phone calls, which allow an immediate interaction with the company, but require high psychological costs. Online channels, on the contrary, allow for a high degree of anonymity and comprise Email or direct chat functions.

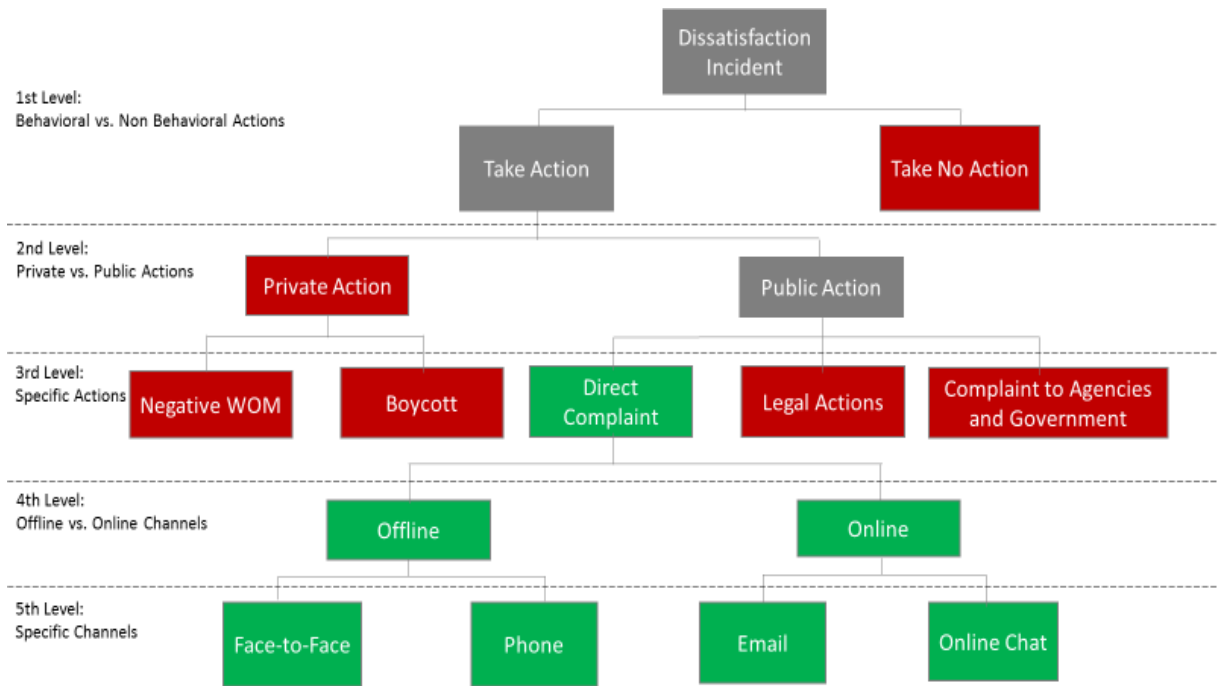


Figure 1: Adapted Complaining Behavior Framework

Source: Adapted from Day and Landon (1977)

From a company's perspective, the desired consumer complaining pattern (marked in green) consists of a dissatisfied customer "taking action" after a critical incident and addressing its complaint to the company directly without any further public or private action. In addition, companies should see complaints as opportunities to improve their services and products. Implemented changes and realized improvements might not only lead to higher customer satisfaction, but also improve brand loyalty and therefore even profitability. There is rarely any other so easily accessible source of customer insights. Thus, complaints are highly valuable information, which can be used for product improvements, quality insurance and market studies without any high investments. (Barlow and Müller 1996; Zaugg 2006)

The worst-case scenario (marked in red) from an organizational perspective is that the customer voices his complaint to third parties (e.g. friends, family members, agencies, governments or legal institutions) and additionally boycotts the brand. In this case the company does not get the chance to know about its mistakes and can not initiate the

respective improvements. Customers not directly addressing the company with their complaint is disastrous for the success of every company as negative word-of-mouth might lead to revenue losses and a bad market image (Zaugg 2006). A dissatisfied customer tells on average 9-15 people about his negative experience, while a customer who gets his issue resolved tells between 4-6 people (Shaw 2013). Those numbers emphasize that customers penalize organizations disproportionately for poor customer service. It takes 12 positive experiences to compensate for one unresolved negative experience (Goodman and Newman 2003). Apart from the negative word-of-mouth it is furthermore crucial for companies to not lose an existing customer. Studies show that the costs of acquiring a new customer are six times higher than retaining an existing one. The purchase intention of an existing customer is between 60–70%, while the probability that a new customer buys a product or service is only between 5–20%. Also, a 2% increase of the retention rate has the same effect on company profitability as a 10% decrease in costs. Those findings demonstrate impressively that it is essential for a company's success to retain its customers and to establish a strong customer relationship, which prevents the termination of this relationship after a critical incident. (Shaw 2013)

## **2.2. Shyness and Complaining**

### **2.2.1. Shyness as a psychological construct**

Zimbardo (2014 p.98) defines shyness as “a heightened state of individuation characterized by excessive egocentric preoccupation and overconcern with social evaluation, ..., with the consequence that the shy inhibits, withdraws, avoids and escapes social interactions.” In other words, shyness is understood as a discomfort and inhibition in the presence of other individuals (Cheek et al. 2004 p.186).



Shyness has three characteristics: little self-confidence, excessive negative self-evaluation and excessive negative self-preoccupation. Shyness implies embarrassment, timidity, fear of rejection or a reluctance to be exposed to inconvenient situations. Shy people engage less in social situations, demonstrate fewer facial expressions, maintain a greater physical distance than non-shy people and exhibit nervousness sometimes. The biggest challenge for shy people is to deal with strangers, people from the opposite sex and people with authority. Shyness can range from a simple occasionally feeling to inhibiting social phobia. (Saunders and Chester 2008; Whitten 2001)

As introversion is often used synonymously with shyness the two terms will be delimited in the following. Overall, shyness and introversion show some overlaps but are not interchangeable. Introverts prefer solitary, but they do not fear social gatherings as shy people do. What makes distinction difficult is that many shy people are introverted. However, there exist also shy extroverts who function best in situations with assigned roles. Carducci (1995 p.38) says: "If you see two people standing by a wall at a party, the introvert is there because he wants to be and the shy person is there because he feels like he has to be there." (Thiessen 2008, Henderson, Gilbert, and Zimbardo 2014)

In one of the largest clinical studies, a questionnaire was developed to detect the level of shyness among the population (Zimbardo and Carducci 1995). Overall, 5000 respondents completed the Stanford Shyness Survey. Not very surprising, the study revealed that 80% of the respondents reported that they felt shy at some point of their life. However, 40% mentioned that they feel currently shy and 91% out of the currently shy admitted that they actively make an effort to overcome their shyness (Saunders and Chester 2008). 65% of the respondents perceive shyness as an intrapersonal problem, while other research suggests that shyness is not exclusively such an intrapersonal problem. External factors like the social environment or culture play an important role in the behavior of shy people and quite often

restrict them in their abilities. For example, the performance of shy pupils might be constrained by an extroverted teacher, who values active involvement in lectures more than written exercises (Carducci 2000). Moreover, the negative stereotyping of shyness in Western countries might even lead to social avoidance and it makes it difficult for shy people to improve their social skills (Henderson, Gilbert, and Zimbardo 2014). Similar observations can be made regarding technical advances. Zimbardo (1995) mentioned that under the strong influence of digital technologies shyness was becoming an epidemic. Digital technologies like the internet, Emails and social media channels force people to avoid personal contact and do not provide shy people with sufficient social interactions to improve their social skills. Zimbardo (1995) figured that by 2000 it would be possible to live a whole day without communication to another living person. The way of communication becomes increasingly faceless and leads easier to mistreatment and disrespect. Technological advances change the culture at an increasing pace. These circumstances lead to less patience and less tolerance towards people who need their time to get familiar with the respective circumstances. Therefore, it can be derived that technological advances disadvantage shy people in training their social skills. Not surprisingly, surveys show that the level of shyness among the population increased from 40% to 48% over the last decade and a half. (Carducci 2000)

### **2.2.2. The role of shyness in complaining behavior**

As stated previously, the complaint intentions of consumers depend on several factors and only a few of them have been analyzed in the literature. As shyness was never analyzed, some of the analyzed indicators might be affiliated with shyness and are described in the following.

### **Shyness and direct complaints**

Stephens and Gwinner (1998) find that customers who fear external blame and shame will more likely project the service failure on themselves than on the company. Thus, they will more likely remain silent than voicing their dissatisfaction towards the company. Another study on individual and situational influences on consumer complaint behavior in 2010 detected that highly impulsive customers react more likely to critical incidents than low impulsive ones. It is assumed that highly impulsive customers are spending less time analyzing a critical incident. Low impulsive customers, on the contrary, think very carefully about complaining and consider several options before taking an action (Sharma, Marshall, Reday, et al. 2010). Further, a significant correlation between power balance and the likelihood to voice a direct complaint was detected by Stephens and Gwinner (1998). As a matter of course, people who feel powerless towards the company are less likely to voice a direct complaint. Powerlessness was explained by belonging to a certain disadvantaged group in the society. The findings of external blame, impulsive behavior and power balance between the consumer and company might be affiliated with shyness and might conclude in a lower amount of voiced complaints.

As stated earlier, shyness affects a large group of consumers and is constantly increasing among the population. Voicing a direct complaint requires social interaction and engagement with an unknown third party. As shy people try to avoid interactions with strangers, shyness might prevent such consumers from voicing a direct complaint to the company (Saunders and Chester 2008). Therefore, the question rises whether shyness plays a role in consumer complaining behavior and if yes to which extent. The following hypothesis will test those circumstances.

Hypothesis 1: Shyness has a negative impact on voicing direct complaints

### **Shyness and negative word-of-mouth**

“It is not difficult to imagine a consumer seeking help and reassurance from family and friends when faced with a marketplace problem” (Stephens and Gwinner 1998 p.184). Particularly, customers with a high self-confidence prefer negative word-of-mouth instead of voicing a direct complaint (Balaji, Jha, and Royne 2015). Thus, the question arises whether shy customers act accordingly:

Hypothesis 2: Shy consumers are more likely to complain to third parties than  
directly to the company

### **Shyness and channel choice**

Shame proneness correlates with customer's complaint channel choice (Mattila and Wirtz 2006). Consumers with a higher level of shame were more likely to avoid interactive channels like face-to-face or phone calls. Internet interaction requires less effort than face-to-face interaction and the anonymity makes it easier for shy people to communicate (Carducci 2000). Similar consumer behavior patterns were reported by Fletcher H. (2009) while analyzing consumer reactions towards the purchase of adult bedroom accessories. A manufacturer and direct marketer of adult bedroom accessories, increased its sales by a third after implementing an online chat. Potential customers felt safer reaching out with their questions about the products through an online chat rather than calling the customer center. Furthermore, studies from Hertel et al. (2008) detected that introverts are more likely to choose online communication over face-to-face interactions in comparison to extroverts. The physical distance through online channels allows for more solitary. As shy people in comparison to introverts fear physical closeness and lack in social engagement, it is of great importance to study not only the impact of introversion on channel choice in consumer complaining behavior, but also the impact on shyness (Zaugg 2006). Thus, the question arises

whether shy people have a preference for online channels voicing their complaint rather than offline channels.

Hypothesis 3: Shy consumers are more likely to choose online channels rather than offline channels to voice their complaint

In the following section the proposed hypotheses will be tested and the respective methodological approach to achieve these results is demonstrated.

### **3. Methodological Approach**

#### **3.1. Approach**

To analyze the proposed hypotheses a survey-based research design was used. Participants were exposed to an imaginary customer dissatisfaction scenario and were subsequently questioned about their behavioral intentions to voice their dissatisfaction. The usage of a scenario ensures control over some confounding influential factors like brand loyalty, product category, price or other situational factors. This control over influential factors is not guaranteed applying the critical incident technique, which is based on a recall of a dissatisfied incident and is a frequently applied methodological approach in the field of consumer behavior. (Sharma, Marshall, Reday, et al. 2010)

As the Better Business Bureau's Top Complaints Statistic 2015 ranked the telecommunication industry as the highest complaining industry and as receiving an incorrect bill was one of the most common reasons for complaints, the survey scenario was chosen accordingly. Further, as mobile phone services are used by a large majority of people, respondents can easily relate to a situation of an overcharge (Better Business Bureau 2015). Thus, it can be ensured that more accurate information is revealed about the respondents' behavioral intentions. In the survey respondents were asked to imagine they have been overcharged by their new mobile

phone service provider and were subsequently asked about their intentions to take actions.

Specifically, all participants read the following:

“Imagine, you just changed your mobile phone provider. After one month, you check your bank account and see that you have been charged additionally 5,00€ for international calls from your mobile phone provider. You know that you did not do any international calls within the last month. How likely would you be to take the following actions?”

The likelihood of taking any of the given actions was measured using a 7-item Likert scale<sup>1</sup>.

Thereby, the following options were given: call the customer service, write an Email to the company, use the online chat of the company, tell a friend or family members about the overcharge, say something negative about the company to friends and family members and take no action at all. The provided answer options were chosen based on the framework of consumer complaining behavior from Day and Landon. The interviewees had either the choice to “take no action” or to “take action”, which could be private actions (negative word-of-mouth by telling friends or family members about the overcharge or saying something negative about the company to friends and family members) or public actions. The public actions were exclusively options to complain directly to the company. Thereby, three different channels were given. The channel choice was based on a study from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) demonstrating that “speaking over the phone” (81%), followed by “Email” (43%) and “Online Chat” (39%) are the most common customer service channels. Similar results were detected by PwC with regards to customer preference (84% calling, 55% Email, 41% online chat). (Bothun et al. 2015; Day and Landon 1977)

To assess whether shyness influences consumer complaining behavior, the level of shyness was measured by the 13-item revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS).<sup>2</sup> The RCBS is

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents was offered a choice of 7 pre-coded responses ranging from extremely unlikely to extremely likely. Thus, the Likert Scale allows the individual to express his likelihood of taking an action or not.

<sup>2</sup> One of the items to measure the level of shyness is “I feel tense when I’m with people I don’t know well” Respondents was offered a choice of 5 pre-coded responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A score above 33 is considered as being (somewhat) shy.

the most commonly used measurement for shyness and has been applied in several empirical studies. (Cheek et al. 2004)

Based on the results of the first survey a follow-up study was conducted. This follow-up study was designed to identify whether the results of the first study can also be applied to other fields in consumer behavior. A scenario in the pre-purchase phase was given, while the respondents were asked to make a reservation at a restaurant. As it can be seen in Figure 2, two restaurants in the same area, with the same price range, type of cuisine, opening hours, rating and amount of reviews were provided to the interviewees. The only difference between the two restaurants was the way to get in contact with the establishments: calling or booking a table through the online calendar



Figure 2: Restaurant Scenario

Thereby, participants were asked the following: “Imagine, you would like to make a reservation at one of those two restaurants. Which restaurant would you prefer?” The results of the follow-up study are explained in a later section.

### 3.2. Sample Group

94 participants (mean age = 26) took part in the survey testing the impact of shyness on consumer complaint behavior. Respondents were told that the purpose of the survey is to study customer satisfaction. Most of the respondents were students (52%) followed by

employees (37%). The country of origin from the participants was quite diversified: German (36%), American (12%), Egyptian (12%), Portuguese (7%) and other nationalities (33%).

## **4. Data Analysis**

### **4.1. Data Analysis of consumer complaint survey**

The following data analysis refers to the consumer complaint survey. Measuring the level of shyness among the participants showed that about 38% are considered as particularly shy. This proportion is similar to the overall estimated level of shyness (40%) among the population. Furthermore, the vast majority of 83% stated that they consider the given scenario as realistic and see it as necessary to take either public or private actions (88%) to voice their dissatisfaction. This behavior reflects the belief that their complaint will make a change (70%) and that they are concerned about the overcharge (70%). Most of the respondents stated that complaining would not make them feel uncomfortable (69%) and is not too much of an effort (54%). Among all the given possible actions participants stated with the highest likelihood that they would tell friends or family members about the overcharge followed by saying something negative about the company to friends and family members. On average, they would tell about 6 friends and family members about the critical incident. This shows that negative word-of-mouth is very common among consumers and critical for every company. Considering the given possible direct complaining channels, the majority would call the customer service, followed by writing an Email and using the online chat of the company. Only 12% of the respondents stated that they would take no behavioral action and remain silent.



### Shyness and direct complaints

In the following section Hypothesis 1 - *Shyness has a negative impact on voicing direct complaints* - is analyzed. The likelihood of voicing a direct complaint was determined through the mean value of the three given channels (Call, Email and Online Chat). The impact of shyness on direct consumer complaint behavior was analyzed by a regression analysis. Figure 3 displays the level of shyness on the x-axis and the likelihood of voicing a direct complaint on the y-axis. This analysis revealed no effect of shyness ( $B = 0.03$ ,  $t(x) = 0.30$ ,  $p = .77$ ).

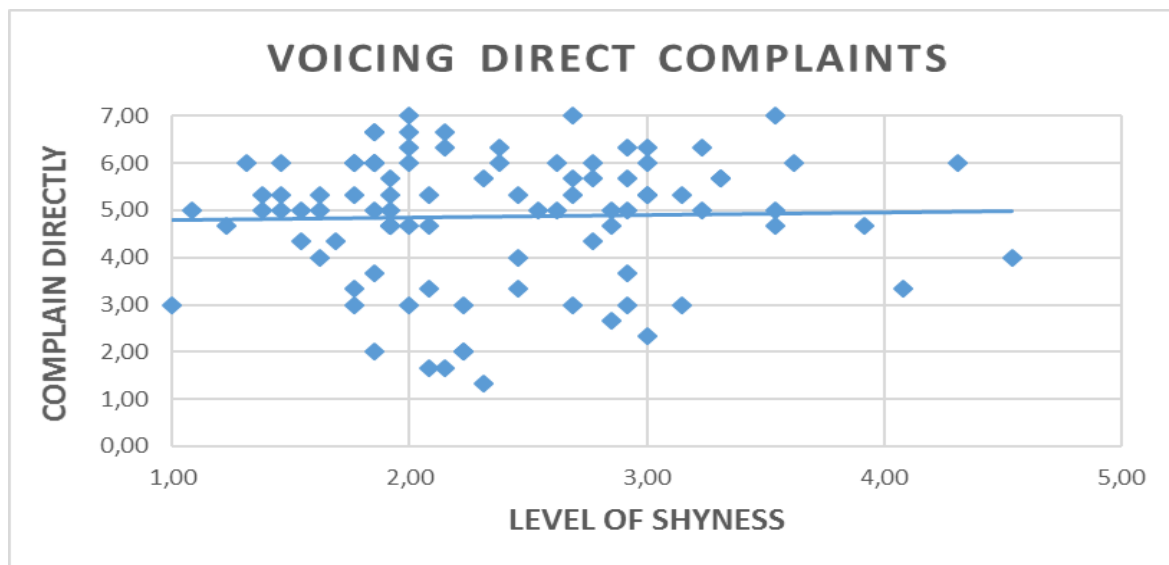


Figure 3: Shyness and its impact on direct complaints

### Shyness and negative word-of-mouth

To analyze whether shy consumers are more likely to complain to third parties than directly to the company (Hypothesis 2) a mixed ANOVA was performed. Thereby, the interaction between shyness and the likelihood of complaining towards friends and family members or the company was tested. The likelihood to complain to the company directly was determined by the average value of the three given channels. However, no significant difference between the complaining behavior of shy and non-shy consumers was determined ( $p = .47$ ). Indeed, Figure 4 confirms that in general consumers have a higher tendency towards negative word-of-mouth than towards direct complaining. The mean likelihood of complaining can be seen

on the y-axis. While the mean likelihood of complaining towards friends and family members is about 5.80 for shy and non-shy consumers, the mean likelihood of complaining directly to the company is with 4.88 by far lower. Having a closer look on the impact of shyness on telling friends and family members about their dissatisfaction, no significant difference between shy and non-shy consumers was noticed. In regards of voicing a direct complaint, the figure demonstrates that shy consumers (5.08) voice slightly more likely a direct complaint than non-shy consumers (4.76). Nonetheless, this slight difference between shy and non-shy consumers can be left out of consideration as the impact of shyness on direct complaints was already analyzed through the performed regression analysis in the previous section and no significant correlation between the two indicators was detected.

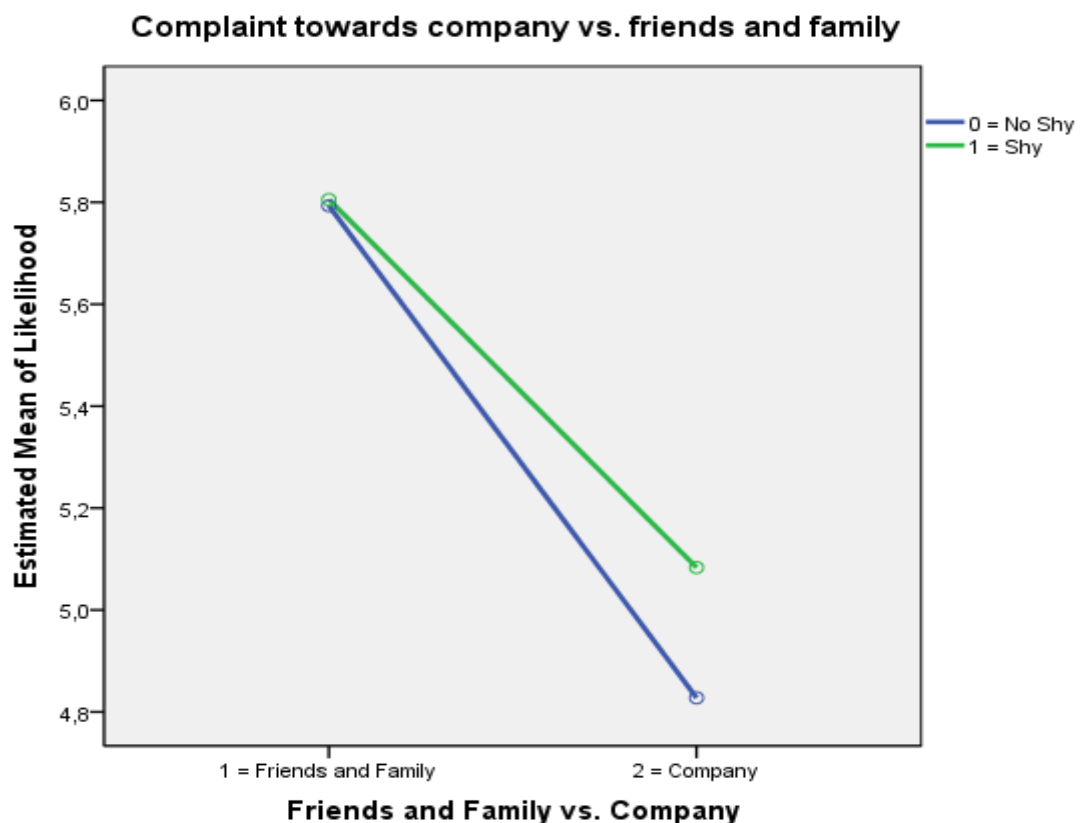


Figure 4: Complaint towards company vs. friends and family members

### **Shyness and channel choice**

In the next step, it is detected whether shy consumers are more likely using online channels to complaint to the company than offline channels (Hypothesis 3). The likelihood to voice a complaint through an online channel was determined by the mean value of writing an Email and using the online chat. The likelihood of using an offline channel was determined by the likelihood of calling the customer service. To test the interaction between shyness and channel choice a mixed ANOVA analysis was performed. The results showed a marginal significant interaction ( $p = .07$ ). Thus, it can be said that shy consumers have a slight preference for online channels in comparison to non-shy consumers. Figure 5 demonstrates on the y-axis the likelihood to use a channel. The x-axis distinguishes between online vs. offline channels. The blue line represents the behavior of the non-shy consumers and the green line the behavior of the shy consumers. In general consumers have a preference for offline (5.43) over online channels (4.58). Having a closer look on the behavior of shy and non-shy consumers, it can be seen that shy consumers are more in favor of utilizing online channels (4.93) than non-shy consumers (4.37). For offline channels the contrary can be determined.

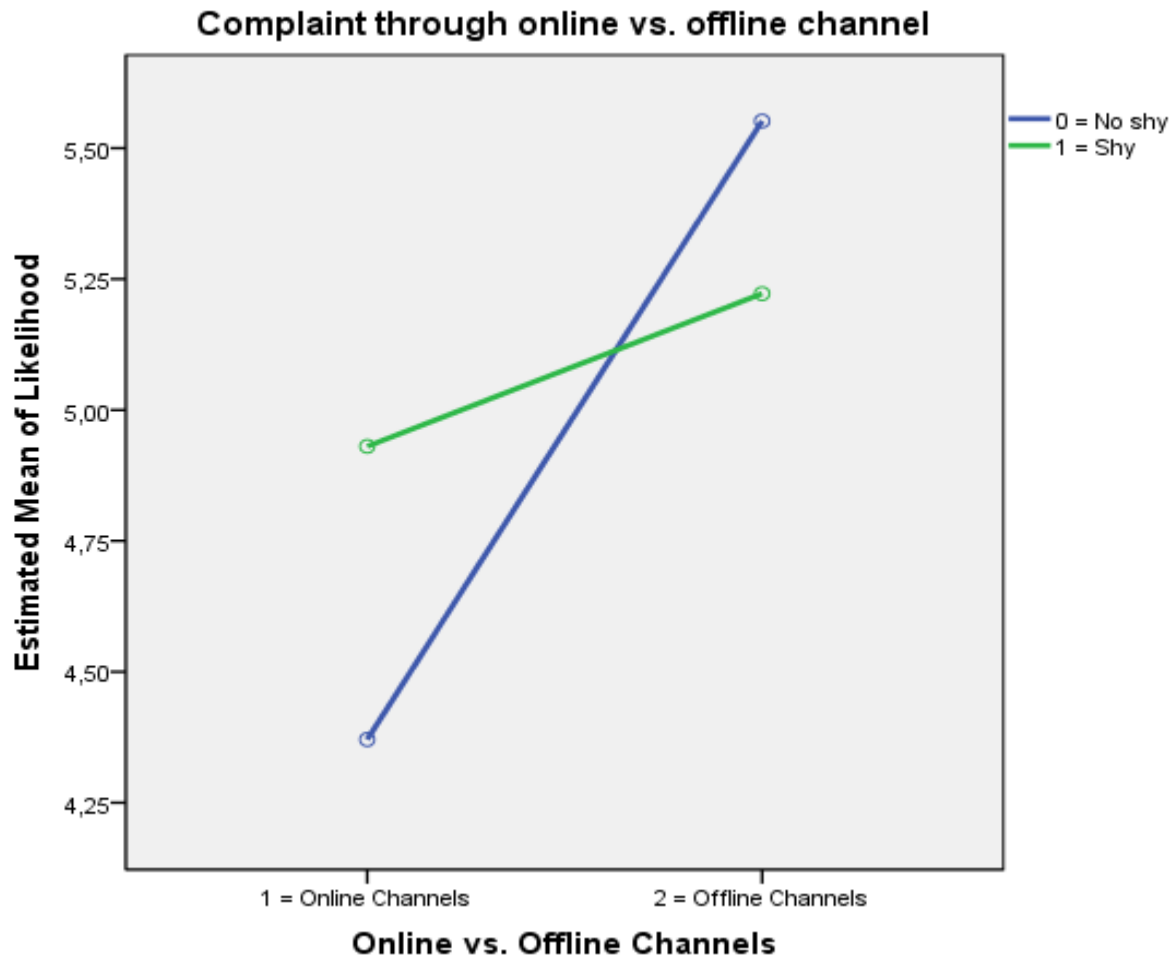


Figure 5: Complaint through online vs. offline channels

Taking a closer look at each of the respective channels, a significant correlation was determined between calling the customer service and the level of shyness. Shy consumers are less likely to call the customer service than non-shy ones ( $B = 0.21$ ,  $t(x) = -2.09$ ,  $p = .04$ ). Analyzing whether the level of shyness has an influence on writing an Email ( $B = 0.14$ ,  $t(x) = 1.37$ ,  $p = .17$ ) or using an online chat ( $B = 0.12$ ,  $t(x) = 1.16$ ,  $p = .25$ ) to voice a complaint the performed regression analysis did not show any significant correlations. The results of the performed analyses are gathered in Figure 6. The indicators, which showed a (marginal) significant correlation towards the examined level of shyness are highlighted in green. No significant correlations are highlighted in red.

H1: Shyness has a negative impact on direct complaints
H2: Shy consumers complain more likely to friends and family members than to the company
H3: Shy consumers choose online over offline channels to voice their complaints
Shy consumers call less likely the customer service to complain than non-shy ones
Shy consumers write more likely an Email to voice their complaint than non-shy ones
Shy consumers use more likely the online chat to complain than non-shy ones

Figure 6: Overview of the analyzed hypotheses

## 4.2. Data Analysis of follow-up survey

In the follow-up survey, 47 people participated. The average age of the participants was 27 and the majority was employed (45%) followed by being a student (43%). Most of the participants were Brazilians (38%), followed by Germans (32%), Americans (6%) and other nationalities (24%). The proportion of shy participants (36%) is similar to the estimated level of shyness among the population (40%). Analyzing whether shy people prefer to use an online calendar to make a reservation at a restaurant rather than calling, showed a significant correlation ( $B = 0.06$ ,  $p = .04$ ).

## 5. General Discussion

### 5.1. Discussion of results

Given the analyzed indicators it can be said that shy consumers are not less likely to voice direct complaints than non-shy consumers. However, regardless their level of shyness consumers have a higher tendency to voice their dissatisfaction towards friends and family members instead of voicing it directly towards the company. The only marginal significant interaction between shyness and consumer complaining behavior was determined with regards to channel choice. Shy consumers are less likely to call the customer service and they have a tendency to choose online over offline channels in comparison to non-shy consumers.

The study revealed that shy consumers do not behave differently on the first three levels of Landon and Day's consumer complaint framework. Shyness had only a minor influence on the fourth level of the extended framework. This means, that shy consumers tend to select the channel to voice their direct complaint differently than non-shy consumers. Similar results have been seen in the follow-up survey when shy consumers had a preference to make a reservation over online calendar versus calling the restaurant directly to make the reservation.

## **5.2. Critical Reflection and Limitations**

It is necessary to be careful in drawing final conclusions about the impact of shyness on the consumer complaint behavior as the self-assessment on shyness through the RCBS requires a high ability of self-reflection. This ability is also of great importance to give accurate information on the potential behavioral intentions. 72% of the participants indicated to voice their dissatisfaction directly to the company. As statistics from the Financial Training Services (2009) revealed that only about 4% of dissatisfied consumers complain directly to the company, it can be anticipated that some of the interviewees would act differently in reality than they stated in the questionnaire. The chosen scenario based approach does not allow a deeper insight into the actions consumers would take in reality. Therefore, it is limited in the extend to draw an accurate image on the consumer complaining behavior. Thus, it is recommended to use another methodological approach (e.g. experiment) in further research to draw a more realistic picture on the consumer intentions (Sharma, Marshall, Alan Reday, et al. 2010).

Consumer complaint behavior is influenced by several different factors as mentioned previously. In the effort to draw a conclusion on shyness in consumer complaint behavior as many influential factors as possible have been eliminated. Nonetheless, determinants like the general attitude towards complaints, previous experiences, laziness or the tolerance level have

an impact on the decision to make a direct complaint. The survey-based research design does not allow to eliminate and control all those factors. Further, the chosen critical incident itself influences the choices of the respondents and might vary by selecting another scenario.

It is also critical that the sample group is small in size and not homogeneous in its origin. It needs to be considered that the different cultural backgrounds of the respondents have an impact on shyness and the likelihood to voice a complaint. Studies showed that shyness is not only intrapersonal, but also influenced by environmental factors like culture. While shyness exists among all cultures, the prevalence rate of shyness, however, varies from culture to culture. Analyzing the effect of culture on shyness and complaining behavior would have gone beyond the scope of this paper. (Saunders and Chester 2008)

Further, it should also be mentioned that the study lacks in a proportional distribution of age and employment status. The average age of the respondents was 26 and the majority stated to be student. This disproportional distribution and the scenario choice makes it difficult to draw conclusions on the general consumer behavior and the respective behavioral attitudes of shy individuals on other products/services and industries. In this context, it should also be mentioned that the relatively young sample group is in general more familiar with online channels and uses those more frequent than older generations.

Only a limited selection of channel choice was given in the questionnaire. Thus, it is critical to conclude that there is a slight preference for online channels among shy consumers when only one alternative as an offline channel was given. Offline channels can also be face-to-face interactions or written letters. Moreover, the choice of online channels is not exclusively based on writing an Email or using the online chat. Adding other channels to the survey might have an impact on the results and the behavioral intentions of the participants. Nevertheless, the given channels are the ones which are most likely used among the population according to a study from PwC (Bothun et al. 2015).

### **5.3. Recommendations**

Regardless of the findings on shy consumers, companies in general should aim to receive as many complaints as possible, resolve them fast and to the utmost satisfaction. Such an exemplary reaction would consumer most likely prevent from boycotting the company or spreading negative word to friends, family members or third parties.

As almost half of the population describes itself to be shy, companies and especially employees need to be aware of this social insecurity when dealing with customers. On the one hand, employees should be sensitive in communicating with shy consumers. Especially when shy consumers voice their complaint through the phone, it is of great importance that employees show comprehension and resolve the critical incident to the utmost customer satisfaction. This positive experience leads to a higher possibility that the shy consumer will reuse the respective channel to communicate with the company. Further, it provides shy clients with the opportunity to train their social skills and to lose their social insecurity in the long run.

On the other hand, to capture the group of shy consumers, it is also important to offer sufficient online channels which have lower psychological costs and ensure a degree of anonymity. In this context Aberdeen Group Inc. claims that companies with a strong customer engagement strategy on omni-channels retain about 89% of their clients (Kulbyte 2016). It is recommended to offer online complaining channels, which guarantee anonymity but also allow a fast interaction with the customer to resolve the issue and to avoid negative word-of-mouth. To ensure anonymity and fast interaction, the implementation of live chats on companies' homepages could be a suitable solution to capture the shy consumers as well. Despite the fact that the conducted survey did not show a higher likelihood for online chats among shy consumers, it should be considered, that online chats are still in its infancy and many customers might be unfamiliar with the channel.



## **6. Conclusion and suggestions for further research**

As a conclusion, it can be said that shyness does not have a significant impact on the high percentage of non-complainers. Non-shy and shy consumers do voice direct complaints and complaints towards friends and family members equally. Further, there is no significant difference in behavioral and non-behavioral actions to voice a complaint among shy and non-shy consumers. The only marginal significant differences among those consumers are that they have a higher preference for online versus offline complaining channels and that shy consumers call the customer service less likely than non-shy consumers. As shy people are a large consumer group and very little is known about their complaining behavior, further research on shyness and its impact on consumer intentions should be initiated. It is suggested to investigate on the behavior of shy consumers especially in face-to-face interactions and how shyness can be neutralized in such situations. In addition, it would be of importance to analyze the impact of culture on shyness and complaining attitudes. As the follow-up study gave already an indication about the impact of shyness on pre-purchase decisions, it is recommended to conduct a more comprehensive study and to investigate on other fields among the purchase process as well. Further research on shyness and its impact on consumer behavior would allow companies to get a deeper insight in the behavioral intentions of many customers. Additionally, this know-how would enable companies to initiate respective adjustments to meet the specific requirements of the large group of shy customers.

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